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C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENNA 000215

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STATE FOR EUR/AGS - VIKMANIS-KELLER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/26/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [AU](#)

SUBJECT: AUSTRIA: NEW SOCIAL AFFAIRS MINISTER: HAUBNER IN,  
HAUPT OUT

Classified By: ECONOMIC-POLITICAL COUNSELOR GREGORY E. PHILLIPS. REASO  
NS: 1.4 (b) AND (d).

1. (C) Summary: Ursula Haubner has replaced Herbert Haupt as Austria's Minister for Social Affairs. Haubner, who had served as State Secretary (junior minister) in the same ministry, had replaced Haupt as Freedom Party (FPO) leader in October 2003. The move was largely a decision of the Freedom Party (FPO), and observers interpret the reshuffle as an FPO effort to consolidate its party structure. End summary.

2. (SBU) Following its traditional New Year's off-site, the FPO announced on January 24 that party leader and state secretary Ursula Haubner would move up to the position of

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Minister of Social Affairs. Haubner, who is the sister of FPO strongman and Carinthia governor Joerg Haider, succeeds Herbert Haupt, who had stepped down as FPO party leader and as Vice Chancellor in October 2003. Haupt has cited health reasons for his resignation.

3. (SBU) The party further designated the FPO's parliamentary social affairs spokesman, Sigisbert Dolinschek, to take the FPO's state secretary slot, which Haubner had held. Dolinschek will become state secretary in the Health Ministry. Dolinschek, a political ally of Haider, is a long-time FPO backbencher and comes from the FPO's power base of Carinthia.

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Reactions

4. (SBU) Haider argued the move made sense because it would give the FPO party leader a full vote in day-to-day cabinet decisions. Wilhelm Molterer, the parliamentary floor leader of the People's Party (OVP), the FPO's senior coalition partner, said the reshuffle pointed toward a "professionalization of the leadership structures" of the FPO. Somewhat predictably, the opposition Social Democrats (SPO) and Greens charged that the move showed the government's "instability." This marks the seventh cabinet change during Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel's second government.

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Comment

5. (C) It would be tempting to read the elevation of Joerg Haider's sister as a step toward Haider's own return to national prominence. Indeed, the changes touched off a new round of speculation that Haider was preparing his return as FPO national chairman. However, there is no evidence to support this hypothesis. Rather, Haupt has been damaged goods since he lost his party leadership and Vice Chancellorship in 2003. Many considered Haubner's ascension as only a matter of time. During her tenure as party leader, Haubner has developed a reputation for competence. Her assumption of full ministerial rank will give her time to enhance her public profile before national elections, which are due in the Fall of 2006.  
Brown